Seamstress and Poet

and Other Verses by

FELICIA ROSS JOHNSON

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SEAMSTRESS AND POET

AND OTHER VERSES

BY

FELICIA ROSS JOHNSON

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RICHARD G. BADGER
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SEAMSTRESS AND POET

and other verses

SEAMSTRESS AND POET

The tawny, last-year berries of the ash
  Move up and down among their shapely boughs,
The breezes sound like waves, that curl and dash,—
  Like brooks in clover-fields, where cattle browse.
Sweet country pictures rise upon my thoughts,
  My feet are hid in leaves, nut-brown and cool;
And as I sew, a silken-broidered wreath
    Doth grow, from fancy wrought,
Of gold-leaf pansies, lilies by a pool,
  And tulips, shining from a riven sheath.

Their beauty grows, and yet they are too still;
  No wheat-ear floats and bends before the wind,
No brimming chalices their odors spill,
  Nor poplar leaf doth show it silver-lined.
They lie with lifeless, ruddy lip to lip,
  In the dim sunshine and the city's smoke;
Unwet with freshening touch of gradual rains,
    Where bird nor bee will sip,
Nor, doth the sweetbriar, swung by a zephyr's stroke,
  Drop a sweet smell, like myrrh at ancient fanes.

And I—well, bread can scarcely be foregone,
  Or I would leave them for a plot of moss,
Where I could watch to-morrow's misty dawn
  From a rill's side, where birches loop across!
Then might I try a gush of mellow song,
  In answer to the thrush's roundelays,
With a sweet surprise, as one in a darkened cell,
    Where a harp had tarried long
In silence, for the master's hand to raise;
  Should strike, and start, at the music's sudden swell.

Then might I learn, from winds and waves, the key
  Wherein to set these haunting, broken runes
That come and go, like weeds in a restless sea,—
  That my heart withholds from my lips in these city noons,—
Then my lips would loose, as at touch of the altar-fire,
  I would stand by the highway, singing, so humanly sweet,—
God's pilgrim poet,—the strains that were His, not mine,
    Sweeping them higher, and higher;
That men would pause to hear in the city street,
  And the chrism of praise on their lifted brows would shine.

Ah, well! I draw again my slackened thread,
  For a needy seamstress has no time to muse;
The rhymes run on in my mind, till the day is sped,
  And, night by night, some precious freshness lose.
Some women would have wrought them long ago,
  Through gloaming twilights in a cradle song,
But I—though holding little children dear,—
    God love them!—stoop so low,
Or stretch so high, that greater fancies throng,
  And baby faces seldom press a-near.

Poor minstrel heart, too tired to sing to the world,
  O hands, too faint to raise the poet's lyre,
God hears the shallowest brook that ever purled,
  In dusky copse, above the harping choir:
And, even so, the songs that thou mayst sing,
  Though chanted in a sighing under-breath,—
Too low to reach thy chamber's furthest bound,—
    Will, winged with praises, spring
Up the blue heights of air, as still as death,
  And He will listen, while the worlds go round!

THE WAIL OF THE MAGDALEN

Here let me crouch, there are none on the street;
  Here, like a blot, by the warehouse wall;
Ah, silent walls, will ye scoff, or repeat
  What I moan and whimper, under my shawl?
The moon is so cold, and so far away,
  Through the soot of the chimneys it cannot shine
As it shone on the house that fronted the bay,
  On the rocky shore, and the water's line,
Where the white-breasted sea-gulls rose to the sky
  When the prows of the boats drew nigh.

The sea breezes stole to my window, at night,
  The sea-song was soft as my mother's own,—
My Mother,—oh God, I am vile in thy sight,
  And she worships, unchid, at the foot of the throne!
If she knows that the baby she rocked on her knees
  Is a sinner, so low that she would not dare
To lift her eyes as high as the trees,
  If the gleam of her mother's robe was there,
I should think that her fingers would drop the lyre,
  In the midst of the angel choir!

Or, mayhap, does the music of heaven go on,
  Though the wail and the woe, of our sins strike through
Do they care? Could the face of a saint look wan,
  Like the face of my father, when first he knew?
I met him full in the lamplight's glare,
  I flung him a laugh for his cry of pain,
And I saw that the sorrow had blanched his hair
  As white as the thorn-buds, that grew in our lane,—
Was I mad, that I laughed, when his old voice shook,
  As he curst me,—out of the Book?

He cursed me—oh pitiful Christ! I am old
But the weight of that curse I will bear to the dead;
Will I cease to remember it under the mould,
When the weeds, and the thistles, are over my head?
And am I, alone, cursed? Who'll believe if I say
That my sin is not mine, but the tempter's, who came
And lured me away from my home by the bay,
Who left me to die, or to live in my shame?
Do they care if their wheels, or their horses' feet,
Throw dust on a hag in the street?

Let them pass in their gildings.—God sees not as man;
He looks through the rind, to the heart of the fruit:
The world may not taint them with curse or with ban,
But he knows if the worm waxes full at their root!
I was bitter and wicked a year ago;
Do you know that you saved me, O blithesome girl,
As you sang in your garden, a hymn, so low,—
Saved from the river's beckoning whirl,—
By a smile and a pity, that haunts me yet,
And a handful of mignonette.

The scent of the flowers went down to my heart,
I thrilled at the touch of your small, white hand;
For I thought of the house, with its curtains apart,
Where a girl, once through roses, looked down at the strand.
Ah, well, though the roof and those windows are gone,
Though the face of the girl has grown haggard and old,
If they carry me, dead, from that door, some dawn,
There is no one to say, "She was overbold;"—
Through His mercy at rest, on the shore, I'll lie
While the winds and the waves go by.

IN THE ALMS-HOUSE

On bush and brake the frost is hoar,
  Knee deep in hollows, lies the snow;
While, softly, up and down the floor
  The feet of wintry moonbeams go;
And, in the hush, before the dawn,
  A boyish face is growing wan.

The death-watch answers beat for beat,
  With his poor heart, that moves so slow;
He hears the watchman in the street,
  He hears the river's sluggish flow,
And through it all there runs a dim
  Remembrance of a childish hymn.

He dreams he lies upon the grass,
  Beneath a chesnut's fluttering leaves,
He sees the mid-day glory pass,
  He hears the birds in the cottage eaves,
And all these dreams and thoughts, among,
  There steals the hymn his mother sung.

No loving tears are on his cheek,
  No kisses on his eyelids fall,
None marks the pulse that grows so weak,
  None waits with him the Master's call;
Alone, he goes, with bated breath,
  To meet this mystery of death.

His ears grow dull to earthly sound;
  The thin hands clasp upon his breast;
A wondrous music swells around,—
  His soul hath entered into rest.—
Rise up, O sun, and hail the day,
  God's angels bear a soul away!

LIVING OR DYING

The garden walks are deep in leaves,
I miss the aster's purple bloom;
Beyond, the wind like Rachael, grieves,
Above the barley's broken sheaves,
And crinkling stubbles of the broom.

There's not a bird that singeth sweet,
There's not a glint of golden sun;
My days have lost their life and heat,
The cruel thorns have torn my feet,
And yet no guerdon have I won.

My brain has toiled, my hands have fought,
My breast has felt the foemen's spears;
And, yet, no victory have I wrought,
No wrong is quelled, no good is brought,
Behind me lie unfruitful years.

I loathe this narrow, worthless life;
I think upon my precious dead,
Who lie so still, where balm is rife,
Where birds, in June, made tuneful strife,
Among the cherries, overhead.

"Would I were dead," I longing, cry,
"Dear Lord," I shame a cause of thine:"—
A sudden glroy wreaths my sky,
A tender Master sends reply,—
"Living or dying, thou art mine."

"Thine, thine, oh Christ,—My life is bare,
No ripe, flushed fruits, nor blossoms shine;
None has more need of loving care,
No one has earned a smaller share,—
But Thy sweet words have chased despair,—
'Living or dying, thou art mine.' "

ADIEU

The golden hunter's moon
  Sends her first glimmer through the window-panes,
  Touching thy forehead, in whose violet veins
The hot blood throbbed at noon.

Under thy quiet palms
  The white breast lieth pulseless, and thy face
  Is still, but radiant with seraphic grace,
As if t'were hushed with psalms.

To my impassioned kiss
  Thy smiling lips give back no sweet return,
  Thro' down-dropt lids no tender glances yearn;—
No words break sleep like this!

Dear heart, t'is over; past,
  Is the long, night of wrestling with thy grief,—
  On the swart hills Dawn flings her ruddy sheaf,—
Tried faith is crowned, at last.

I dare not make complaint,
  Nor will I burden thy new wings with tears,
  Since thou wert pleased to drop life's bitter years:—
Adieu, be glad, sweet saint!

THE TRUANT

All the sunshine beckoned him,
Waving through the chamber dim,
  To the door that stood ajar;
And the lady-bird, that came,
With its wings of purple flame,
  Led him through the meadows far.

Fair the meadow flowers were,
Blue the cockle, in the stir
  Of the wind among the corn;
And across the thymy leas,
Where he waded to his knees,
  Played the little lambs, unshorn.

In a hollow chirped a spring,
Set with daisies, in a ring,
  Whence a runlet welled away;
And he followed, followed on,
Till it bounded, like a fawn,
  Through the rocks and woodland grey.

Tender mosses held his feet,
And the place was made so sweet
  With the birds' and water's chime,
Knee, and feet and head he sunk,
Watching, up the poplar trunk
  How the sunlight tried to climb.

Down, and down the sunlight fell;
And his eyelids dropt as well,
  In the woodland's sleepy calm;
O'er him hung a dragon-fly,
But his hands were fain to lie
  Folded, lightly, palm to palm.

Thus he slept; and then he dreamed
That a wondrous glory streamed
  All about him, far and wide,—
Though the snakes laid in the sun,
He was not afraid of one,
  For an angel stood beside,

Tall and fair, and full of grace,
With a holy, smiling face

With the long, and lustrous wings;
And he knew she chased away
Catamounts, and were-wolves gray,
Lizards, and all harmful things.

So his sleep was safe and good,
In the strange and whispering wood;
So his father found him there,
Smiling, softly, as he slept,
And his little hands had kept
Palm to palm, as if in prayer.

ESTRANGED

The cloudy tresses of the beauteous Night
With stars, like golden daffodils, are strung;
Above her brow, so radiantly white,
The silver crescent of the moon is hung;
And by gold-pinioned Hours the way is led,
While her dusk-sandaled feet the zodiac tread.

Where art thou Ethel? At thy window, west,
Curtained with drooping roses, darkly red?
Or, wandering, through the night, pale Memory's guest,
Where orange-blossoms glisten overhead,—
Where the sun fell, this eve, a fiery brand,
Into the slow gulf waves, that wash thy strand?

Do lilies gleam amid thy raven hair,
As they were wont, before the shadow fell?
Does thy soft, olive cheek as often, wear
The peerless tinting of a rose-hued shell?—
And, sometimes, does thy haughty, crimson mouth
Sing our old songs, in thine own cherished South?

From the Night's brow the stars drop silently;
Day's harbinger up the grey orient streams;
Ah, we shall meet no more, my own lost love,
Save in the hopeful, constant land of dreams,
Till the kind angels loosen life's frail bond,
And guide us, both, to the desired Beyond.

HUNTED TO DEATH

Waterlilies, sweet and cool, flecked the stirless, wayside pool,
Like maids' dimpled shoulders, a-gleaming through the leaves;
Where she wandered, all distraught, her fawn eyes sad with thought,
Till the reapers long had brought from the fields, their latest sheaves.

With one hand she swept aside grape-vines, trailing low and wide,
And drew apart the worn and rustling pennons of the corn
The other, tightly prest to her white, and heart-rocked breast,
All the agony confest that her tender soul had torn.

Listening, like a wounded hart, with her panting lips apart,
For the voices of the hunters, and their hoof-beats on the sands;
While the young life, from her veins, wasted in the flowering lanes,
And along the heathy plains, drawn by slander's sheathless brands.

Open stood her cottage door, with the creepers clustering
o'er,
That were scarlet, with their trumpets, in the sunshine of
July;
But a cherished dream was dead, when their od'rous lives
had fled,
And she had no hope, she said, in her poor life's by and by.

In the deep and shadowy well honeysuckle blossoms fell,
And the lichens grew and strengthened, all along its use-
less sweep.
Wind-cleft dahlias dropt and died all along the pathways
wide,
But no footstep through them hied, and the old house lay
asleep.

Half unhinged the garden gate, and the arbor desolate,
While upon the moss-grown seat lay her loved guitar un-
strung;
And a village story grew,—ah, God knows, it was not
true,—
That 'twas shame had chased the hue from her cheek, so
round and young.

When the Indian summer came, with its tapestry of flame
Hanging all the whispering forests, in the hazy, sapphire
air,
Where the church-spire cast its shade on the ivied graves,
she strayed,
Tracing on the stones decayed, records of the sleepers
there.

If a passer's step she heard, swifter than a woodland bird,
She had flitted through the cob-webs, curtaining the old
church door,
To the gallery, where an owl, grey priest, witless of a cowl,
Sat and sang his vespers foul, in the star-light cold and
hoar.

Through a breezeless winter's night snow-blooms dropped
their petals white,
And were heaped in gleaming furrows, on the graves, at
break of day,
When a neighbor found her there, with her wan hands
clasped in prayer,
All the anguish and despair from her face had passed
away.

So they smoothed her ebon hair, as they whispered,
"she is fair,"
"But her feet had grown so weary, and 'tis well that she
hath rest,"
And they laid her 'neath the snow, while the winds sobbed
to and fro,
Where the sweet heartsease will blow, in the spring, above
her breast.

Oh, false tongues, ye broke a heart!—she had known no
meager part
Of life's bitterness before, yet her woman's heart was
brave:
But you crushed her spirit down, with your cruel words
and frown;
So she won a martyr's crown, just beyond a martyr's
grave.

A REQUITED VIGIL

She waited at her casement while the hills
Doffed their gray cowls, in the dawning, north and
south
To gird them with the rainbow-scarfs of rills,
When the Sun had kist the East with ruddy mouth.
The air held a sound of lightly shaken wings,
And, in the lane, she heard the voice of girls,
Who called to her, "The breath of day unfurls"

"The tents of the morning-glory along the hedge,"
"In the tulip-tree an oriole sits and sings,"
"And the reed-bird cries in the sedge."

"Rise up, and lay your sober musings by,"
"We wait, the shallop in the mooring rocks;"
"Come down, and in your shining ringlets tie"
"Sweet streaked pinks, and spikes of purple phlox;"
"Come down, the world is full of love and mirth."
"With wine-wet fillets we have bound our doors,"
"And merry feet of dancers beat the floors,"
While viol-music rings a jocund peal;—
"Come down, the fair are crowned unto their worth
By knightly lovers leal."

The voices died:—far out a swelling sail
Swam, like a petrel, on the lake, at noon;
Ungathered roses crost her fingers pale,
Their red hearts breaking in a fragrant swoon.
The roses, from her cheeks were blanched, as well
But steadfast shone the soul from out her eyes,
And holy manna made both sweet and wise
The patient lips that whispered, "Lo, I wait,"—
But hark, across the noon, the voices fell
Of children, at the gate.

"O come," they cried, "the world is fair i' the sun,
"The brooks are merry, flowing to the sea,"
"The cunning squirrels in the chesnuts run,
"And the butter-flies, on the fens, are a sight to see."
"The posies in the woods are all a-blow,"—
"There are lady-slippers, and a thousand more;"
"With cockle blue the fields are running o'er,"
"And scarlet poppies set the wheat a-fire:"
"We'll gather them until the sun is low,"
"We'll be gay and never tire."

She smiled, and answered, "Dear ones, go your way,"
"And may a loving angel walk beside,"

"But I have other tryst to keep to-day"
Than gleaming flowers in the forest wide."
The childrens' song was echoed from the down,
The doves went cooing softly, each to each:
It was so still she heard the dropping peach
That broke from boughs above the garden wall;—
The sunset stained the steeples of the town,
And the night began to fall.

"The sunset's gold is like a shattered lance"
"That falls in glittering fragments down the sky;"
"Oh, maiden, let your tender, earthward glance"
"Outshine the moonlight, from your casement high."
The lilies listen to the ruder breeze,
"Trust me, oh love, I'd keep you white as they;
"My arms would hold you from life's grimy way;—
"Then come, with truth and pensive beauty stoled,
"To hear, beneath the fitful boughs of trees,
"The tale that grows not old."

The lover spoke, and listened, for her tread;—
No silence chased the silence from her stair,
And, yet, beside the casement, overhead
Her face was lifted up, in praise or prayer.
"Not mine," she said, "are love and wedding chimes;"
"I keep a holy vigil, hour by hour,—
"May Christ my weary soul with patience dower,—
"Till He doth make His mercy manifest."
A parting footstep crunched beneath the limes,
And a bird was scared from its rest.

She watched the midnight come and go, alone,
The hours crept on toward the voiceful dawn;
Dawn came, and found the casement open thrown,
The virgil finished, and the Watcher gone.
A sound, as of smitted harps, more felt than heard,
A shimmer of robes, a sweep of angel wings,

A fragrance, finer than the south wind brings,—
  Was silently transfused throughout the air,—
Ah, His shining hosts, to welcome her, had stirred,—
  When the world was not aware.

THE TOKEN-BIRD

The distaff trembles within my hand;
  Margeret, set the wheel away:
Loosen the spindle, and slip the band,
  For granny will spin no more to-day.
It was never my habit to lounge in the sun,
So surely my work is almost done,
  For how to live idly were hard to learn:—
Well, well, we have never our ways to choose,
And when God sends the darkness we cannot lose
  The glimmer of stars that He makes to burn.

He sent me a token but yester-night,
  As I sat by my wheel, in the twilight dim,—
A grey, grey bird, with an eye of light,
  Flew in, and perched on its quiet rim;
It perched, and ever it looked at me.
I waited as still, with my hands on my knee,
  Till it wandered away on a noiseless wing;
I know what it tokens, and am content:—
Ere many more days and nights are spent,
  Slowly for me, the bells will ring.

Let them ring! the village was poor and new,
  And no bells were a-chiming, when I was wed,
They will ring for my marriage and burial, too,—
  The bells that ring over me when I am dead.
I measured the linen, long years ago,
For a shroud, and the sheets as white as snow,—
  There is rosemary in them to make them sweet:—

I would like to lie at the window west,
Where the chirping of swallows is heard the best,
And the voices of children in the street.

They will carry me down the church-yard rows,
To the place which has long been kept for me,
Where the fever-few in the long grass blows,
And the locust pipes right merrily,
I shall lie with my nearest, my dearest kin,
Husband and children shall close me in,
With the baby that lived but a year at my head;—
Ah, I wonder if she has out-grown us quite,
Reached to a full-grown angel's height,—
The baby we garnered away with the dead?

'Sturtiums and butter-cups over me sow,
Such as your father, when I was a lass,
Coming to meet me, at sunset's glow,
Gathered for me in the meadow grass.
In the harvest sun, and in April rain,
The flowers shall be for a sign to us twain
That our love is not killed by the floods and the rime,
For under the bitterest snow and sleet,
Like us, they'll be waiting, to rise complete,
With beautiful garments, in God's good time.

The flails in the barn are a-dropping fast,
But the first of the wheat will not go to the mill
Till my season of labor and life is past,
Till my wheel in the garrett is standing still.
Nay, child, 'twas no dream,—'tis the bird that appears
To all of my race at the end of their years,
And my life is I know, as a tale that is told.
But why should I linger?—my work is all done,
And I never was happy to lounge in the sun,
Nor to drowse by the fire, when the winter was cold.

THE SWING IN THE APPLE-TREE

The sunbeams come, the sunbeams go,
The boughs droop gently over;
I hear the breezes laughing low
Among the bloomless clover.
A-swinging to and fro, I pass
Through leaves that autumn dapples,
And watch, upon the fading grass,
The fall of russet apples.

I listen for the babbling creek
That stirs the noon-day quiet,
Of summers gone, its quavers speak,
Of flag-flowers running riot:
O lonely creek, your shallow brink
Another spring will grow them,
For flowers bloom, full sweet, I think,
Where'er the angels sow them?

I hear across the meadow-lots,
The sheep-bells softly tinkle,—
They crop the tender daisy plots,
Which frosts begin to crinkle.
I cannot see one Katy-did,
Of all who make this wrangle,—
I wonder if they have'nt hid
Amongst the love-in-tangle?

A kildeer cries above my head,
The branch beneath him quivers
And, downward, through the sunlight red,
A golden apple shivers.
My swing goes up, my swing goes down,
The breezes hurry after,
And hope and youth, indulgent, crown
The day with joy and laughter.

BIRTHNIGHT GUESTS

The long-dead leaves come hurtling on the panes
  Like bat-wings, flying, wildly, to the light;
The winter's moonshine streaks the barren lanes,
  Where Summer sowed her daisies, right and left,
And under the fence-rows, the pansy anchorite,
Where the cricket whistled, softly, out of sight.
  Alas!—the tiny piper lieth mute,
  And the pansy, long since, trampled underfoot,
With the snows above them, drifting all the night.

The winds are shrieking 'round the icy eaves,
  They shake a bird's nest from the chesnut tree,—
A worthless thing, half-full of withered leaves,—
  Like the poor life the years throw down to me,
For my hopes, like the birds, have flown across the sea.
Sad years, glad years, the guests of the night are ye;
  I count you as you gather, one by one:—
  You, first, who held me a babe against the sun,
Till I laughed and danced, like a flower on a breezy lea!

Then, you, who brought some childish tears and sighs,
  A thorn on the bush, at the rose's heart a bee;
But the world was so great, and the sun was so full in my eyes,
  It seemed but a tuneful rain that dript in the grass at my knee
And I sang with the thrush, and cried with the quail, in my glee.
Of you I learned to haunt a shady bank,
  Where snow-ball blossoms drifted on my book;
  Beside a pool, where lilies swam and shook
When doves between them, shyly, stooped and drank.

While you were here, I reared me wondrous shrines,
  Whose gleaming spires ran, whitely, to the sky,

Where thought was too deep for a voice, like the wind in
the pines,
And the glimmering feet of the angels seemed so nigh,
When I heard no sound but the kildeer's wailing cry.
You came, oh, cruel year, with wild despair,
With the sweet death-smile on a face too early hid
From long, long love, beneath the coffin-lid;—
And the spade of the sexton crunched thro' the daisies fair

Then, you, and you, and you, came pressing fast,
My life went on, toward its Summer's noon;
You gave a friend, whose love, I hoped would last,
And you, took back again so dear a boon,
And thereby, plucked the sunshine from my June;
You come, the last, as dim as day-break ghost,
Have you cool fruits, for souls that suffer thirst?
What germs of good have you to blossom nurst?—
Alas, thy empty garner grieves me most!

Pass on, pass on, O bitter two-score years,
Your sister, waiting on the threshold, stands;
I welcome her with slowly dropping tears,
I lay my web of life upon her hands,—
A web, all crossed and seamed with knotted strands.
Who cometh else? an angel, fair, upright,
Whose wings in two effulgent rainbows bend;—
O holy Faith! thine eyes the shadows rend,
And all the hill-tops bloom with morning light!

THE OLD MILL, AND THE MILLER

'Round and 'round the quiet wheel
Strings of water weeds entangle,
In the rafters, stained with meal,
Sits an owl, great-eyed and grey,
And the sharp-tongued jay-birds wrangle,
Where the reddest sunbeams stray.

Evening shadows creep the bank,
  Where the yellow cowslips nestle;
On the sunset's glowing flank
  Threatening clouds are gathering,
Angry winds begin to wrestle,
  And the frogs forget to sing.

Watchers in a silent room
  Say, "he wakes," to one another,
Seeing how a sudden bloom
  Brightens up the pallid cheek;
And they hear a whisper, "Mother,"—
  But the voice is deathly weak.

"Hear," he whispers, "hear the mill;
  Hear the wheel, how glad it dashes,
Hear the tinkling waters spill."—
  But the watchers hear no more
Than the hearth-stone drop of ashes,
  And the wind a-wailing sore.

"Do you see my sister May,
  Through the flowering buckwheat coming,
With her golden hair astray?"
  "No," the watchers say, "for years
Honey-bees have wandered, humming,
  Where she lies, too deep for tears."

"Tears," he says, "I saw her weep
  As she watched her squirrel dying,
When the Christmas snows were deep;
  Now the grass is summer-green,
And tea-berries, red, are lying
  All the woodland rocks between."

"Mother, did you call? I come;
  But my feet are sore and weary,

And it seems so far to home:—
  Long I've searched the woods to bring—
While the mill wheels clinks so cheery,—
  Little May this berry string."

"Father." Now the talk is done,
  And he drops asleep in smiling,
Sleeps, nor wakes at morrow's sun:
  Still his hoary head is bowed,
Through the blackbird's clear beguiling:—
  And the watchers sew his shroud.

When the morning mists unwind
  From the creek, that breaks in laughter,
Wheel and mill no more they find:
  Fierce it struggled with the, blast;
But the owl, upon his rafter,
  Hooted, as it fell, at last.

AMONG THE SHEAVES

The wan moon glideth up the sky;
Another harvest day is done;
The whippowill, in the field of rye,
  Its wailings has begun;
The night dews glisten on the leaves,
And, yet, I stand among the sheaves.

The reapers' singing echoes back,—
  A simple song of love and truth,—
Ah me, if now my heart has lack,
  I had such fancies in my youth;
And hearing the forgotten strain,
Thoughts, long asleep, awake again.

With bitter thought and fingers faint,
  I gather wheat-stalks, gold and crisp,

And weave them in a garland quaint,
With poppies red, and grasses crisp;
Wishing that I might gather so
The dear, lost days of long ago.

GOING TO SCHOOL

Through meadow grass, waist high, they wind
Along the path so narrow,
And pluck the pliant spires, to bind
Some sprigs of homely yarrow;
They go by brooks that softly drip
Among their flow'ry sedges,
Where minnows, through the shadows slip,
Where flocks of wrens and robins dip
And drink, along the edges.

Across the ruddy, clover lots,
And pastures, wide and knolly,
Where sheep lie, here and there, like knots
Chance-dropt, of lilies holy:
They drop the bars, and call the cows,
"Come, Brindle, Pink and Cherry,"—
They stroke them, gently on the brows,
They wreathe with blooming, locust boughs
Their necks so rough and hairy.

A sudden wind, that sweeps the dell,
A spicy scent is blowing,
The children need no more to tell
Where peppermint is growing.
They thread the rustling rows of corn,
Whose ears are fit for roasting,
And run a foot-race down the hill,
Where in the winter evenings chill,
They always go a-coasting.

They skip between the orchard rows,
  Where apples hang, and mellow,
While sunlight gives them rosy glows,
  Or strips them with its yellow,
And through the barley, set in sheaf,
  Or ready for the reaping;
Until the school bell, rings its call,
And through the maples wide and tall,
  They see the belfry peeping.

NEW YEAR'S NIGHT IN THE OLD HOUSE

The mistress mused by the glowing fire,
  When the year was in its wane;
And the frozen boughs, as the wind rose higher,
  Knocked at the window pane,
Like a guest, who was bidden, but long delayed,
Who hummed, through his beard, as he knocking, stayed
  A tender chromatic strain

The fire-light glimmered on book and bust,
  And the curtains' lacey sweep
Swelled and swayed in a sudden gust,
  As the door unclosed, and, like one asleep,
She saw how a long procession came,—
Man, and maiden, and stately dame,—
  As if each had a tryst to keep.

Tenants of by-gone years were they,
  Holding their tenures one hour again;
Living their lives in the old-time way,—
  Burying, wedding, toiling, as then,
Greeting their guests with a welcome kind,
Eating life's apple all clean from the rind,—
  List, the clock, in the hall-way, struck ten!

The bride, in her veil like a blossomy mist,
  Came, smilingly, up the stair,
With her bridegroom beside, but they paled, as they kissed
  At the sound of a tearful prayer,
At the sobbing wail of a funeral hymn,
And their fair, young faces looked sad and dim
  By the funeral torches' glare.

Softly the dirge died away on the ear,—
  The rooms were all lit, and a-shine
With jewels, and satins, and womans' gear,
  Fashioned in quaint design;
And the voices of viols rang loud over all,
While the feet of the dancers were swift to their call,
  And the goblets brimmed over with wine.

Ah, the lights, were soon quenched, the viols all mute,
  The red wines all spilled on the floor,
The garlands all withered and dead underfoot,
  The guests flown away;—as a breeze
Whirls the ghost of the thistle away out of sight,—
When the chimes of the New Year rang out on the night,
  —With a master hand touching the keys.

The mistress mused by the waning fire,
  While the bells kept ringing on,
Saying and singing, "O soul, aspire
  From the height of the year that is gone;
The dust of old errors shake off at its bier,
Stand up in pure vestment, and so shalt thou hear
  The voise of the Lord in the dawn."

THE MINSTREL BRIDE

I found a forest,—old, and grey, and dim,
  Whose moist air held a smell of sassafras,
Of spicewood, and from every dripping limb
  A shower of grape-bloom dropt into the grass.
In snowy umbels gleamed the cornel trees,
  Girding the forest, with a glimmering zone,
And haunted by the gold-ringed humble-bees,
  The bronze nasturtiums shone.

Upon a sudden, through the forest hush,
  There rose a music, tenderly distinct,
And holy, like the voice of hermit thrush
  To human thoughts and human language linked.
I searched the clasping branches through and through,
  For wings of beryl-green and scarlet crest;
And found, O song, your wondrous beauty grew,—
  A brown bird on her nest!

My heart was groping in a moonless dusk,
  My works were dead, my faith was incomplete;
Of life, I had but pierced the bitter husk,
  And, therefore, judged the grain not over-sweet:
But, so the gracious music in me wrought,
  I recked not, then, if honey 'twere or gall;
The petty woes of life I counted naught,
  For love was all in all.

I wooed the minstrel to my lonely breast;
  A thoughtful silence had between us grown,
Yet, all the while, I felt beneath my vest,
  Her lighter heart-beats answering mine own.
We lingered on the forest's twilight bound;—
"O sweet," I doubting cried, "you would return?"
  So rare a madrigal her answer crowned,
  That Faith had naught to learn.

Thenceforth unto my constant heart she clings,
  My life is merged in hers and hers in mine;
A deeper wisdom to my days she brings,
  Through human love I draw to Love Divine.
Untimely ills our faithfulness enhance,
  As grapes are mellowed by the early frost;
Her songs wax richer as the years advance,—
  No note of love is lost.

IN TURKEY-FOOT*

September 22, 1773

Lower, and lower, dropt the sun
  Adown a west of amethyst,
In wooded vales, the twilight dun
  Creeping, the lowest branches kissed,
While slanting spears of sunset light
  Yet lingered on the topmost leaves
That, here and there, were gaily dight
  With the red and gold, that autumn weaves
    Year after year, in Turkey-Foot.

The farm-house daily tasks were done,
  The pewter shone, in order set,
The stint of flax was deftly spun,
  The bleaching linen stretched and wet.
The maids had gone to the orchard wide,
  While the mistress sat by the door, and told,
To the fair children, at her side,
  Quaint tales of men and times of old:—
    That autumn eve in Turkey-Foot.

**Turkey-Foot, which was named by the Indians, is a valley in the Allegheny mountains in which is the confluence of Laurel Hill creek with the Youghiogheny and Castleman rivers.*

The gloaming deeper grew, and still,
Save the soft inter-blended sound
Of moving leaves, of bird, of rill
And faint, and far, the bay of a hound.
" Once on a time, 'neath palace roofs,"
So went the tale, and all gave heed,—
When, hark, a sound of horse's hoofs
Rang out,—a rider and his steed
Came swiftly on in Turkey-Foot.

The dame arose, with stately grace,—
" Good eve, sir, will you please alight ?"
" Nay, dame," he said, with anxious face,
" The Indians are abroad to-night:"
" The country-side to warn, I ride;—
No easy task my good steed hath,—
" They come apace, make haste and hide."—
So saying, down the bridle-path,
He rode away from Turkey-Foot.

A moment's space she stood aghast,
Then, praying, with her children small
She took her flight, and came at last
To where the corn grew thick and tall;
And crouching there, all night they stayed,—
All night, nor either moved, nor slept,—
The owls a doleful screeching made,
The frightened children softly wept,
That long long night in Turkey-Foot.

Dawn came, but to her ear intent
Came, too, a rustling in the corn;
" They come," she said, her courage spent,
" God help us, creatures so forlorn."
She claspt her boys, with shuddering fear,
She thought upon their absent sire;

The steps came near, she saw appear
Gun-barrels, tipt with sunrise fire:—
Oh, woeful morn, in Turkey-Foot!

A horse, near by in the clearing, neighed,
A lark, from the meadows, soaring sang,
One called her softly, as she prayed,—
From out her arms the children sprang,—
"Father has come; oh joy," they cried.
Half-dazed she stood, in glad surprise,—
On the song of the lark, as he heavenward hied,
Her praise and rejoicing seemed to rise:—
Thus rescue came in Turkey-Foot!

Night came, the fort was safely gained,
Night came, the children went to rest;
But to the mother, ere it waned
God's gift had come,—a baby guest.
Time passed; she throve, this little maid,
This fort-born flower of Seventy-three,
Nurtured in times of war and raid,—
Mother of patriots brave to be:
So runs the tale in Turkey Foot.

NEGRO MOUNTAIN*

On Negro Mountain, cloaked in snow,
The serried ranks of pine trees stand
Like sentinels, in the wintry glow
Of sunset, stretching o'er the land;
They stand, majestic, looking down
On the old highway's curving line,
On mountain peaks that vales enshrine,
Where creeks their narrow beds embrown.

**Negro Mountain, one of the highest peaks of the Alleghany Mountains in Maryland, took its name from the incident here told. The scene of this event was on Nemacolin's trail, afterward Braddock' Road.*

One spring, long years agone, 'tis said,
So stood these ever-watchful pines,
In sombre robe, and dark-cowled head;—
Howbeit the moss and woodland vines
Had bourgeoned into gold and green,
Though pink the dells with Mayflower were,
And all the forest was astir
With spring-time life, half-heard, half-seen.

The Indian trail in leaves was deep,
The thick boughs arched it overhead;
The quiet place seemed all asleep,
Until there came the muffled tread
Of many feet;—from shady brake
The frightened pheasant, whirring, sprung
The shy thrush dropt her song, half-sung;—
The drowsy wood was all awake.

Through flickering sunshine on they went,
A band of men, stern-faced and strong,
Belted and armed, with look intent
And hand on flint, they marched along.
Women were there, and children small,
Of worldly gear some little store;
Some dusky men from Afric's shore:—
And yet not two-score souls in all.

In this wild land a home they sought,
And trusted God to aid the quest;
Nor knew that on their way they wrought
A lasting path from East to West.
Faint sounds arose, and in their rear
Strange shadows, dim as summer haze,
They paused, with musket raised, to hear,—
They knew the red man's stealthy ways.

One look, one word, swift bullets sped
  Unlooked for by the savage foe,
The fight was short, the Indians fled,
  But laid one mighty foeman low;—
A negro slave, of matchless size,
  And prowess, for his strength renowned;—
  Stately, as some black prince, uncrowned,
He stood, then fell no more to rise!

His life-blood welled away in the fern,
  All help was vain, with failing breath,
He whispered, "Go, they will return,"
  "Farewell,—go, leave me,—this is death;"
"Not so," the Captain said," I stay,"
  "And I as well," a comrade cried:—
  The train moved down the mountain-side,
And the day went down to evening grey.

Night came, and mirk it was, and dark;
  Rain fell upon the dying face,
A tent of silver, birchen bark
  They set to shield his resting place.
No fire had they, no moon, no light,
  And yet they used their utmot skill
  Until the restless form was still,
When rosy dawn drove out the night.

No marble marks the lonely grave,
  In which they laid him down to rest,
And yet no great cathedral nave
  More grandly could his tomb invest:
For clear-vioced thrush and oriole
  Sing here their summer roundelays,
  And winds their diapasons roll
Above him in the wintry days.

Full oft, on winter nights, of old,
When the great back-log glowered red,
This tale of death and ruth was told,
This tale of heroes sore bestead.
And the slow centuries' hand has set,
On Negro Mountain's wooded crest,
This story, like a coronet,
To teach that brave ones pity best.

LOST

The lute-like voice of Peace was in the land,
The cannon slept, the sword to scabbard clung,
When seeking thee, I trod the small lake's strand,
With its green fringe of fern-brake over-hung.
I wandered through the wood, and down the hill,
But bloomless briars ran riot in thy grot,
Knee-deep in mosses stood the seat by the mill:—
Alas! I found thee not!

There was no listener to the minstrel beck
That kissed the red-lipped roses, by thy door;
No glint of golden hair on a snowy neck,
Like yellow stamens in a lily's core.
But such a bitter truth was told me there,—
My poor, lost love, what cruel words they said,—
It had been joy, I said, in my despair,
If I had found thee dead!

Ah, Elinore, is love so little worth?—
God knows I loved thee fervently, and long!
I could have dared all woes and cares of earth,
With thy unbroken troth to keep me strong.

In starry bivouac, and contested field
I bore the memory of thy whispered words,
Each day, I heard thy vows, in song, revealed
By southward-flying birds.

There was no doubt in all my thought of thee;
If death had touched me, I had died in hope
That those dear, violet eyes would weep for me,
As I laid, resting on some sunny slope.
After the toilsome march, the mad affray,
Methinks such cherished resting had been sweet:—
Death passed me, but with Hope and thee away
Life's sadness is complete!

AT NIGHT

The moon has come out, and the ministrant stars
Like beacon-fires, gleam by the jasper bars
That sever the angel-land from this,
And my horse's hoofs beat on the golden sand,
That throbs and trembles along the strand
To the river's passionate kiss.

I've enwreathed in his floating coal-black mane
All I could get since the summer's wane,
Snow-drops white, and barberries red;
And he joys through the leaf-strewn woods to hie,
Hushing the Katy-did's tuneless cry,
And crunching the acorns under his tread.

We exult in our onward, reckless course,
We hear, for a moment, the mill's voice, hoarse
With singing, by night and day;
We catch but a glimpse of the water's dash,
For an instant are touched by the lamplight's flash,
Then, speed in the dark away.

Mile follows mile; see my boy, how the light
Shines from the village-panes into the night,
"Welcome," it softly saith;
Do you know? Do you smell yellow currants, ablow
Just by the side of the gateway low,
Or the sweet-brief's spicy breath?

BELOVED, BIND YOUR SANDALS

Beloved, bind your sandals to your feet,
For, lo, your pathway lieth thro' the dark:
No more from banks of daisies, white and sweet,
You'll chase the gleeful lark!
Pluck off the fuchsias from your breast, unthread
From your dark hair their petals' scentless red,
And plait among them passion-flowers instead,—
The emblems of His passion and ascension,—
Your peans to inspire,
Till like a fragile lyre
Swept by a great chord, at its utmost tension,
In rapture you expire.

Ah, linger not, dear heart, look back no more
Upon the fields with amber flowers sprent;
Let pink-lipped shells lie moaning, on the shore,
When ocean caves are rent
By stormy waters; let the sunbeams throw
Their golden ingots through the birches low,
Let thyme, uncropt, in sloping meadow grow;
For life to you is full of deeper meaning;—
Love, some one faints with grief,
Some tried heart needs relief;—
God's harvest field is ready for the gleaning,
Oh, haste, and bind your sheaf!

I would not have you listen lovers' lays,
Nor were it well to fling the arid noons
Of mortal love upon your peaceful days,
They brighten poet's runes,
But drain the springs of life, with wearying heat;
No more to honeyed words your pulse must beat,
No longer on your lips love's wine be sweet,
With witching reveries your steps detaining:—
Pass on, sweet summer-time
Of dalliance and rhyme,
For all those heights where afternoon is reigning,
Are yet to climb!

Ah, yes, 'twere easier to fold a palm
Beneath a bloodless cheek, to lie so still
Beneath the myrtles, in some church-yard calm
That one might hear the trill
Of any bird, that carols to his mate,
But, Love, He wills that you shall work and wait,—
Awhile to stand, uncrowned, without the gate,
To muffled echoes of its joy to listen,—
Then Death will turn the key,
And, kindly, make you free
To enter, where Heaven's praising hosts will glisten
Upon your raptured sight.

THE TAMBOURINE GIRL

Yestermorn I heard her sweet bells clanging,
'Mongst the trees, that grape-vines over-run,
On their bossy trunks and boughs out-hanging
Misty, purple clusters, to the sun.
Far she wandered from the city shadows,
Resting, often, on a mossy stile;
Wandered thro' the country lanes and meadows
Sweet with clover-tops, and chamomile.

Blithe, it was, when locust blossoms whitened,
Underenath the fragrant boughs to lie;
Watching how the stars, like beacons, brightened
Up the dusky blue of evening sky.
Gently, on her, fell the spell of slumber,
Fainter grew the owl's uncanny scream:
Woodland sprites, and fairies, without number,
Flocked about her, in the land of dream.

Blither 'twas, when harvest fields had yellowed,
Poppies red, before the wains to gleam;
And, by farm-house gates, where peaches mellowed,
Gay to sing, and toss her tambourine.
How, she laughed, and mocked, the doves, a-crooning,
Where the maple trees together lean;
How she loved to play to a school, in the nooning,
While the children danced upon the the green.

MOTHER AND SON

THE SON

The Morning walks upon the hills,
She climbs the cliff with rosy feet;
With piney smells the forest fills,
And makes the mossy hollows sweet;
But through the light, and odors rare,
And through the dashing water's sound,
The fox, that crouches in his lair,
Can hear the howling of a hound.

For, icy cold his master's face,
His eyes are shut beneath the sun;
He loiters from the morning chase,
The dews are thick upon his gun.

A wind is ruffling in his hair,
  A wasp has lighted on his wrist;—
Does he stir?—What rises on the air,
  Is it breath, or but a thread of mist?

A fawn is leaping through the rocks,
  And leaves a sound of falling hoofs;
He heeds it no more than the rain, that knocks
  By night, upon the village roofs.
The pheasant calls unto his mate;
  The hunter sleeps on, in his grassy bed;—
O faithful hound, you may howl and wait,—
  Alas! you cannot wake the dead!

THE MOTHER

The mist across the valley breaks,
  The early sunlight reaches through,
To gild the spotted lily-flakes
  That night winds scattered, where they grew:
The lake grows brighter in its reeds,
  It laps the shore, like dipping oars;
The young larks twitter in the weeds,
  The day-light streaks the cottage floors.

The lady-birds are all astir
  In vines, about the window grown,
But ah, they bring no joy to her
  Who waits behind them, all alone.
There is no rustling in the pines,
  No shot of rifle, sharp and clear,
No smoke ascends, in trembling lines;—
  He does not come,—he is not near!

Can you not sing, O hermit thrush,
  This song, to soothe a heart that breaks,
"About His own, in plain or bush,

The Lord a strong encampment makes?"
Can you not sing, with holy breath,
That, "If He chooses, here or there,
To lift them through the gate of death,
His Heaven fronts them everywhere."

ROBIE

Winsome Robie, you are still,
While a sudden, sober thought
Touches you with honeyed bill,
Like a humming-bird, that brought
Richest nectar to her brood;—
Let no gayer thought intrude,
For I love you in this mood.

Twisted grape-vines drop a shade,
Changeful, cool, about the door;
And you counted, as you laid
Baby-wise, upon the floor,
Clustered grapes, that hourly grew
Darker, with their misty blue,
Where the sun was looking through.

Do you hear the meadow-lark,
Singing, yonder, in the birch,
That your eyes flash out in "hark,"
Like two blue-birds from their perch?
Though the song is clear and sweet,
Follow not, impatient feet,
For the bird has wings more fleet!

Hither flits a butterfly,
Like a pansy on the wing,
Pausing, for a moment, high
On a nodding leaf to swing:—

No, you cannot reach the place;—
Now it brushes by your face,—
  Will you give the truant chase?

Through the grass, in dizzy rings,
  'Round and 'round again, you go,
Butterflies are naughty things
  That they mock our Robie so.
Here it is! ah, what a shout!
What a laugh a-rippling out;—
  But, 'tis followed by a pout!

Ah, the pretty thing is fled,
  Robie grasped it over far;
—Swiftly in the grass, his head
  Droppeth, like a shooting-star:
Shall the darling laugh or cry,
For a tear is in his eye,
  Yet he laughs, he knows not why?

Gathered, safe, in loving arms,
All his tears are chased away,
Slowly yielding to the charms
  Of the drowsy, autumn day,
While the little pewees keep
Chirping, in the clover deep,
  Weary Robie falls a-sleep!

A REASONABLE SERVICE

One time I revelled at life's wildest feast;
  I bound the dripping fillets of the vine
About my temples, and my thirst increast
  With frequent quaffings of unholy wine:
The liquid topaz dropt upon my cheek,
  And a new madness lightened through my veins.
  I held aloft my lyre, with fiery strains

I sought to echo Sappho's burning Greek;—
  But lo, the tense strings snapt;
  A black bat, wheeling, flapt
Its wings about the lights, that flared, as in a gust,
Then died, and I was groping in the dust.

"Oh, Miserere," so I wept, and cried,
  As, comfortless, I wandered through the night,
And, aye, a lonely whipporwill replied
  With plaint for plaint, within a wooded height.
Long days I languished in the desert calm,
  Where thirsty suns had sucked the moisture up:—
There was no shadow of a spreading palm,
  No spring went trickling, from its mossy cup:—
  Weary and faint, I laid
  My face upon the sands, and prayed,
"Oh, for the Helper, oh, for Gilead's balm!"

"Child," said a tender Voice, "thy care be mine,"
  "Lean thy tired head upon my loving breast."
My grief found solace in that Voice Divine,
  My broken heart was healed, my limbs had rest.
Rose-scented breezes stirred, across the plain,
  There was a sound of rippling water, cool,
  Green, waving, palm-leaves arched a lucent pool;—
So sweet the place it eased all thirst and pain.
  So in His Presence kept,
  With heavenly dreams, I slept,
And woke, new-hearted, with His armor on,
Sworn to His Service, in the joyful dawn.

THE WIDOW

Did I hear them aright? Tell me, child, do they say
  That your Grandfather smote me so sorely, by will?
Is it true that the strangers are coming to-day,

Ere the posies are grown by his grave on the hill?
Last year, when red poppy-cheeks burnt in the wheat,
We loitered along, in the ripening heat,
And he said to me, "Mother, if I am at rest
When another year's poppies have bloomed out complete,
Will you bring me a nosegay of them for my breast?"

"Ay, Father," I promised. "each year till I die,"—
Is it right now, to make me break faith with the dead?
Would it comfort me, think you, next summer, to know
That a stranger, for money, would pluck them, instead?
Must the homestead be sold, and must I, who came in
A bride, in the May sun, and robins' sweet din,—
Full of love, full of hope, with a strong heart beside,
Totter out, with my grey, widowed life, to begin
It anew, at a hearth-stone, unknown and untried?

'Tis no willl do you say, but the law of the state?—
Men's law, then, not God's, to make homeless the old!
For the home and the farm, I toiled early and late;
Now my home is dismantled, the farm will be sold.
It seems but a month, since I sat by that door
To wait for my sons, who were killed in the war:—
The bearers trod over my heart, as they went
To those graves on the hill;—can it be, that no more
I may watch there, and pray, when the daylight is spent?

My sons to my country I gave,—let it pass;—
The law leaves no home in my country, for me;—
The oak-leaves are yellow, and sere is the grass,
And as sere is my life, with no springtime to be.
Let us go, since to tarry and sorrow is vain!—
Strange voices, and hoof-beats, I hear in the lane,
Where the pinks and the daisies are lovely in June;—
Ah, only in dreams shall I see it again
In the light of the stars, or the glory of noon!

OVER THE WAY

A maiden sits among the vines,
  And faint-flushed roses of the May,
And sings an old-time poet's lines,
  On her balcony, over the way.

I can not hear the poet's words,
  The maiden singeth aye so low,
And, aye so loudly sing the birds,
  But its burthen well I know:—

Love, deathless love, is all the theme;
  No other one could touch those eyes
With such an ecstasy of dream
  As in their splendor lies.

Her eyes like pansies after rain,
  Are purplish, velvety, and sweet:—
Ah, the sound of her voice, in that old refrain,
  Comes, witchingly, over the street.

Her curling hair is ruddy brown,
  Like chestnuts, that October reaves
From out the burs, to shake them down
  Amongst the rustling leaves.

Softly she swayeth to and fro,
  And lifts a rosy, dimpled palm
To shake syringa blooms, like snow,
  Down through the morning calm.

Sweet, strip your senseless flower-sprays,
  Sweet, sing your poet's tender runes,
But, mind you, on whose peaceful days
  You fling love's arid noons.

Some cannot bear that fervent glow,
  Some faint upon those yellow sands,
For fennel and rue, not roses grow
  Perennial, on Love's strands.

The bee doth hum a lullaby,
  The sunlight fainteth at her feet,
Her eye-lids lower dreamily;—
  She sleeps:—dream on my sweet.

Dream on, of hearts forever leal,
  'Tis said that dreams come true in May,
And 'tis true, that a heart, for woe or weal,
  Beats for you over the way!

WATCHING THE CORN

The maple trees were red with bloom,
  The daffodils were springing;
And down amongst the early broom
  The meadow-larks were singing;
When leaning on the corn-field gate,
  And weaving pliant rushes,
Young Harry watched the corn till late,
Till in the sky, so blue and great,
  Burnt out the evening's blushes.

From out the woods, the fields across,
  He heard a partridge whistle;
Grasshoppers sprang from out the moss,
  A robin bent the thistle;
Grey squirrels, merry, timid things,
  Peeped, archly, from their burrows,
The butterflies, with golden wings,
Chased round the field in mazy rings,
  The crows lit in the furrows.

He heeded not;—the cool, spring wind
  Swept o'er his forehead lightly,
Some hope, or vision of the mind
  Lit up his blue eyes brightly;
The future opened to his view,
  All full of grand endeavor;—
He trod its sunny vistas through,
He saw his youthful friends, all true
  And loving to him, ever.

He heard the trumpet notes of fame
  Swell out a glorious measure;
No act of life was weak, or tame,
  Well-earned his earthly treasure.
His fellow-men, whose ways were rough,
  Warmed them before his fender,
His life was fair, and bright enough,
His hands were brown, his words were bluff,
  His heart was pure and tender.

Thus, sights and sounds to him were borne
  But faintly, through his dreaming,
Though all the while, above the corn,
  The jetty crows were screaming;
Till in the furrows, long and wide,
  They settled to their thieving;—
He waked, he saw, "Begone," he cried,—
Rushes and dreams were thrown aside,—
  Ah, both are useless weaving!

THE LITTLE GLEANER

She glides among the banded shocks,
  As blithe as robins after rain,
With pansy eyes, and tossing locks
  Of tawny gold, that shame the grain;

She follows where the binders go,
To glean, among the stubble low,
  The stalks they spill or break in twain.

The reapers smile to see her face,
  They scatter stalks before her feet,
They lift their heads, as though her grace
  Sent life and coolness through the heat;
And listening to her childish song,
They spread the rustling swaths along,
  And say, no bird could sing as sweet.

Where tardy clover blossoms late,
  And humming-birds suck clover-wine,
At noon, she loves to sit and wait
  Till sickles freshly, clink and shine:
Or, where a streamlet parts the grass,
She feels the supple zephyrs pass,
  And hears the crickets piping fine.

She turns aside the sickle keen
  To save a sparrow's humble nest,
Then goes her merry way to glean
  The wide, wide field, from east to west,
Till, slyly, o'er the noisy mill
The moon is rising, fair and still,—
  And truant birds go home to rest.

She climbs the fence's lichened bars,
  And bears away her broken wheat;
She smiles to see the peeping stars,
  She sighs to hear the lambkins bleat;
And gaily skirts the sluggish pond,
To meet her spaniel, just beyond,
  Who guards her to village street.

The while they go, she twists a chain
  Of lady's slippers round his head;

She greets a beggar, in the lane,
  Who toils to make his leafy bed;—
"Good-night," she says, and passing so,
She leaves in his heart a warmer glow,
  As if an angel passed instead.

The village panes are softly dusk,
  The streets are blithe with childrens' play,
And down across her beds of musk,
  A tiny square of light doth stray;—
She treads the walk, she shuts the door,—
The darkness gathers, more and more,—
  May angels keep her, night and day!

OUR PLAYHOUSES

Through the fever-few, that flowered
  All along the crooked lanes,
Through the orchard, close embowered,
  Through the sunny, barley plains,
Where the tanned and stalwart reapers loaded up the heavy wains:

Through the woods, where leaves a-shaking
  Sent a murmur on the air,
And a thrush, the silence breaking,
  Sang a strain beyond compare;
Looking for our rocky houses, so we sought them everywhere.

Lo, we found them, set in mosses,
  By a softly humming brook,
Flat and massive, rough with bosses,
  Like the shields the giants took,—
We were glad we never met those giants but within the story-book!

Quick, we brought for their adorning
  Mosses from secretest dells,
Poppies, wet with dews of morning,
  Buttercups and bluest bells;
And we rifled brook and dingle for their brightest stones and shells.

Doors, we had, both wide and stately,
  Hung with wreaths of ivy green;
Beds of flowers, planted straightly,
  With the tiny walks between,
Sloping, terrace after terrace, to the water's crystal sheen

Never palace floors were muffled
  With a carpet, soft as ours;
And the breeze, that by us ruffled,
  Brought a smell of locust-flowers,
While a mocking-bird was singing, singing all the summer hours.

Slowly, o'er the meadows level,
  Lower, redder, dropt the sun;
Then we made a royal revel,
  For the wondrous work was done;—
Bird, and bee, and saucy chipmunk, we invited every one.

Banquet-hall, and feast were splendid,
  Fire-flies hung on every spray;—
But, if all the guests attended
  We could never surely say,
For an owl, among the hazels, hooted, and we ran away!

SEEING THE ANGELS

The snow has a glitter, like steel, in the sun,
  Down from the hemlock it falleth, in sheaves;
The brooklets are wakening, one by one,
  And the icicles drop from the burdened eaves;
The eyes of the baby are drowsy and dim:—
  The snow-birds may chirp on the window sills,
  They may tap at the panes, with their slender bills,
But they win not a look, nor a smile, from him.

The logs on the hearth are engirdled with flames,
  In the steep, blackened chimney they brighten and leap:
But he looks not;—the kitten plays frolicsome games,
  But he heeds not, for slumbers that over him creep.
Softly the coral is loosed from his hold,
  His eyelids drop low, though a thread of blue
  Glimmers the golden lashes through,
Like a pool that the grasses half enfold.

His sleepy-song ends with a fluttering sigh,
  He has set his white feet on the threshold of dreams;
Let the evil shrink back, and the worldly go by;—
  He is pure, he may walk by the heavenly srteams.
He smiles,—'tis a smile that an angel might wear,—
  Ah, he sees the kind angels, with beautiful wings,
  He heareth the song that an angel sings,
Over the hills, in the thin, blue air.

O, baby, awaken, and tell it to me,
  Tell me the heavenly talk that you heard,
Tell of the angels you went to see,
  Repeat what they said to you, word for word.
You awake, and your eyes have a tenderness new,
  You smile, but alas! you've no words to reply,
  And I fear you'll forget, as the time goes by,
Ere the language of men has been taught to you!

POPPIES

Drifting on a tideless sea,
Where the foam-caps break and flee,
'Neath my shallop's slender keel;
And the idle, dusky oar,
Lit by sunbeams, faint and hoar,
Dripping, gleams like burnished steel.

Wide-fringed poppies, white and red,
Twine about my figure-head,
Cluster in my shallop's stern,
Whence their drowsy odors steal
On me, till my senses reel
With the incense which they burn.

Burn their altar-fires more bright,
Deeper red, intenser white,
Cool leaves drop across my eyes;
And a tender, choral strain,
With a frequent, sweet refrain,
On the listening waters dies.

"Morpheus, great god of sleep,"
Still the songs this burden keep:
Poppy-incense clouds the sight:—
Tranced, I drop my useless oar,
And our rock-engirdled shore
Fadeth from my vision quite.

Sea-gulls, swooping, touch my sails,
And I feel the spicy gales
Of the east, upon my face;
While we near a nameless coast,
With the palm trees, like a host,
Crowding to its landing-place.

Still that dulcet ode is sung,
Still that slumberous scent is flung
  Backward, on the ocean breeze;
While my shallop glideth past
Shores, where Rome her glory cast,
  And through storied Grecian seas.

Swift, my bonny shallop laves
In the dim and sluggish waves
  Of the lotus-bearing Nile;
But I shun these orient lands,
With their burning, golden sands
  Stretching many a weary mile.

Northward, westward, then we steer,
  Sighting the horizon clear,
  For our cliff-shores glimmer nigh;
And our bright flag, overhead,
Seems of poppies, white and red,
  With a square of evening sky.

Ah, the vision changeth all,
And I see a hamlet small,
  Set upon a mountain side;
With a gun-shot, now and then,
Echoing through wood and glen,
  And the black-birds singing wide.

Then a field of swaying wheat,
And three little pairs of feet
  Clinging to the mossy bars,
And three faces, young and bright,
Watching poppies, red and white,
  Bloom amongst it, thick as stars.

"Morpheus, great god of sleep,"
Faintly, down the tideless deep

Drops the pean that allured;
And within a narrow bay
Ruddied by the sunset's ray,
Is my shallop safely moored.

THE WAYSIDE SPRING

It rises in manifold bubbling waves,
In a cup-like hollow among the hills;
Through the feathery fern, at its brim, distils,
And wanders away through the echoing caves.
It washes the wild grapes' farthest shoots,
Till the juices swell in their globes of blue;
And steals into sight by the maple roots,
In the wayside shade, where the wood-doves coo.

Autumn and winter, summer and spring,
It loiters not in its tawny sands,
But sends its bright outlets, in ribbony strands,
Life, and love, to the deserts and fields to sing.
When the crocuses open their lustrous folds,
When the breezes are faint with the mayflowers' smell,
When the robin his earliest carnival holds,
It rings, on the stones, like a fairy bell.

When the pink-flushed heart of the forest rose
Awakes to the winds that are come from the south,
It lifts to the traveler's thirsty mouth
The cool, clear drippings of mountain snows.
All the long days of summer the mower is blithe,
He lengthens the swaths, with a steady swing,
And nightly, he drops the half-moon of his scythe
In the daisies, and drinks at the wayside spring.

When the scarlet maple leaves checker its bed,
Reft from their boughs by the earliest frost,
The voice of its music is lowered, not lost,—

A plaint for the summer that lieth dead.
And in winter, unwilling to lie and look,
Like a prisoned heart, through its icy bars,
It leaps through the fetters it cannot brook
Up to the light of the wintry stars.

It images many a school-boy's face,
Rosy and laughing, enframed in its curls,
It mirrors the brown-cheeked beggar girls,
Who smile at their red lips' pictured grace:
Eyes that are hollow with crime or want
Look in the water, that whirls and shines,
And a brimming cup of it, tastes, they vaunt,
Sweeter and better than Rhetian wines.

It sings in its channel, a handbreadth wide,
Ages on ages, in sun and rain;
And its carol has ever this brave refrain—
"Patience and honor are closely allied."
The green, grateful mosses are kissing its feet,
The flowers their garlands of praises bring;
And the wayworn and weary are glad to greet
The sight and the sound of the wayside spring.

THE TWO KNAPSACKS

Wife, do you hear the doves a-cooing down in the glen,
Above the whistling of scythes, and the talk of the busy men?—
And into the room's cool shadows the afternoon sunshine peers,
Thro' the leaves of the scarlet creepers flinging its golden spears.

So come the thoughts, and the dreams, of the days that forever are lost,
Lifting my old tired head, so bowed with the slow years' frost;
Making less tedious the waiting for the call that shall make me young
In that land where there is no age, nor pain, and where praise is forever sung.

Dear, do you see how the sunlight plays on the knapsacks, hung by the door?
It brings me a host of memories, and I seem to see, once more
The comrades who marched, and fought with me, when the old knapsack was new;—
Ah, of all my comrades of 1812, the years have left but few.

Do you remember the music they played, when we marched down the village street?
You stood at the gate, to say good-bye, so brave, so girlish, and sweet;
I laid the picture away in my heart, with a tenderness all untold,
And I kept, like a gem, the carnation that dropt from your bodice' fold.

The flower is kept in the knapsack, now, and like me, is past its prime;
Faded it is, and stained with blood, for 'twas close to my heart at the time
I was wounded at Lundy's Lane, but I hope that my friends will know
That I want it laid above my heart, when my pulses are beating slow.

The other knapsack is Willie's—he is my blue-eyed pet,—
He is a man, now, do you say ?—I know, but I often forget.
When last at home, I remember, he was strong, and tanned and tall,
And the even, soldierly tread of his feet made music, to me, in the hall.

How well I recall how I steadied his feet, when he learned to walk alone,
It seems but a week and day since then, but Will to a man has grown
And fights for the Flag:—see, wife, the dusk is beginning to fall,—
And, hark, there's the sound of the trumpet, I must answer the Captain's call!"

When lights were brought, and the grandchildren came trooping into the room,
With musical talk and laughter breaking the pleasant gloom,
The old man had answered the call he had heard, through the summer twilight, air,
And his wife, with a smile on her beautiful face, lay dead in her great arm chair.

The flower, all withered and stained, they found close clasped to his silent breast,
And they left it there, when they carried them to their quiet churchyard rest;
Where carnations and starry myrtles, about them, will bloom, in the spring,
And robins, above in the branches, will sweetly, their requiems sing.

THE OUTCAST

The mows are heaped with sweet, new-gathered hay,
It hides the rafters, and the swallow's nest,
Long, waving lines of yellow sunshine play
Across the old man's breast.

Among the shining straws his fingers twist,
Beneath the grizzled hair his eyes grow bleared;
So heavily he draws his breath, I wist
It scarcely stirs his beard.

There is a handbreadth of September sky
That looks upon him, from the broken roof;
He sees the clouds, like ships, go sailing by,
The sunset's rainbow woof.

For him, one star with steady lustre burns
And nightly, touches his worn feet with light;
He sees the swallows, when the morn returns,
Towards it take their flight.

Sometimes he hears the feet of autumn rains
Go up and down, along the shingles old;
He hears the farmer whistling in the lane,
The blackbirds on the wold.

Threescore the years since life for him began,
"Threescore," he whispers, huskily, "threescore,"
And has a dream of laughing boys who ran
Along a shelly shore.

Fond lips grew tremulous with tender words
For him, but that was many years ago;
All day, among his jasmines, humming-birds
Went, whirring, to and fro.

Ah, well-a-day, then followed sin and shame,
That filched the peace and glory from his days;
He fled, to hide him from his evil name
In dreary, country ways.

The brindled heifer stands within her stall
And watches him, with mutely pitying eyes;
A mournful cricket pipes upon the wall:—
How still the old man lies!

The blue-winged jays are singing at the door
Among the sumach torches, kindling red,—
Still is the breast, beneath the beard so hoar;—
Hush, the old man is dead!

THE REST AT THE WELL

I lean across the well's low parapet,
And see the stirless sheen of water, set
Like a rare opal, 'mid its rocky walls,
O'erhung with cunning draperies of moss.
Half-way an amber ray of noon-tide falls,
And fills the broken spider-webs with gloss;
A peach tree drops its rosy blossom-scales
In silence, through the shadows, soft and brown,
And, like the froth from brimming, milky pails,
The lucent flowers of the plum come down.

There is no trace of windlass, or of sweep,
Save a long line where ranker ivies creep;
No thirsty lips those crystal waters pass,
No chain, nor bucket, slides across this rim;
There are no foot-prints on the ribbon-grass,
Unchecked the cricket sings his lonesome hymn,
From out the mansion door no maidens come;—
The hinges start, the latch is dark with rust;—

Among the broken hives no brown bees hum,
The hands that took their golden store, are dust.

A moment since, I dreamed the place was astir
With laugh and song, with spinning-wheel's low whir,
With creak of wains, with steady clank of flails,
With faces, smiling through the clustered vines,
From windows set ajar to catch the gales,—
The pleasant gales that blow by spicy pines,—
But at that one word, "dust," the picture wanes,
I lose the sweetness of some afterpart,
As when a bird that sings in the flowery lanes,
Drops, tuneless, with a bullet in his heart.

I question, with sad eyes, the slumberous calm,
I measure sand, within my narrow palm,
And say, "Mayhap this handful held a soul,
This was a heart, or red lips of a girl,
Or this its glowing, chesnut color stole
From silken meshes of a baby's curl."
I toy with vexing mysteries of doubt;—
Life seems so poor, a narrow tread-mill round
To, haply, tread a few ripe kernels out,
And, later, spill them idly on the ground.

"Then what avails our toil?—no work is wrought,
Our cycle of fourscore is counted naught,
The spilled and scattered grains no more we find,"
I murmur, with my hands across my eyes;
Forgetful, that this seeming loss behind,
The priceless gain of coming harvests lies.
For the corn and wheat grow green in the furrows made
In the olden time;—they come from the old-time grain,
And the old-fashioned pinks are so sweet in the tangled shade
That the wayfarer plucks them and gathers up hope again.

MADGE AT THE TOLL-GATE

The quails are whistling in the brake
About the ripening cherries,
And lilies bloom, that are a-shake
All night with steps of fairies;
For little Madge, the good and true,
Has seen their footprints linger
Among the grass, in drops of dew,
And on the daisies, streaks of blue
Attest a fairy's finger!

Madge sits, all day, beside the gate,
Among the clustering roses,
Sits dreaming of the noble fate
Which life to her discloses;
But, now and then, along the way
The carts and wagons rumble,—
The teamsters pause their toll to pay,
And down again to common clay
Her wondrous castles crumble.

One day she read of fairies good,
And brownies, wierd and cunning,
And fancied that the thrush, who stood
Upon the fence, a-sunning,
Was one of them, without a doubt,
And thought he would have spoken
Of what his mission was about,
But when his song had rippled out,
He fled, and gave no token.

The book laid open on her knees,
Unnoticed was her knitting,
Till, in and out, among the trees
The twilight shades were flitting,
Till, round and red, above the hill,

The harvest moon was glowing,
While frogs were piping, loud and shrill,
And in the fields beyond the mill,
The kine were softly lowing.

Her bright head lowered on the book,
Down dropt her curling lashes,
And nothing stirred, except the brook,
That by the roadside dashes.
When she awoke, great golden bars
Of sunshine, crossed her pillow,
Quenched was the faint light of the stars,
And like a vessel's mast and spars,
Uprose the giant willow.

Still, by the gate, Madge sits and dreams,
While, roses round her, redden;
And hears, at times, the heavy teams,
Whose rumble nought can deaden;
And oft she hums this simple strain,
Which makes her blue eyes glisten:—
"Oh, life is full of hope and gain,
And birds sing sweet in every lane,
If we will only listen."

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